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HOUSEMAKERS' CHAT

Monday, December 11, 1939

Subject: "NEW STUDY OF WOMEN'S MEASUREMENTS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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Richard Brinsley Sheridan seems to have inspired our Washington reporter this week. She starts off with this parody on his well-known tease:

"Now that we're through with the maids of fifteen,
We'll measure the widows of fifty;
We'll measure some flaunting extravagant queans.*
And we'll measure the housewife's that's thrifty."

"In other words," she writes, "the Bureau of Home Economics is sponsoring a new body measurement study, to try to get some better basis than we have at present for sizing women's garments and making patterns that result in well-fitting clothes. You remember that about 2 years ago, in cooperation with the Works Progress Administration and 18 colleges and other educational institutions, the bureau began taking the body measurements of American boys and girls from 4 to 17 years old. They measured almost 150,000 youngsters. The object of this study was to find a better basis for sizing children's clothing than by age.

"The children's study was completed a few months ago, and as a result, the Bureau proposed two body measurements- height and hip measure- as a basis for sizing children's garments. The adoption of this proposed standard is now up to the trade. Meantime, requests have been pouring in for a similar study on women's body measurements. Even age can't be used for sizing women's clothes, and the commonly used bust measure tells nothing as to the length of a dress, its hip size, the shape of the shoulder, or the position of the waistline, or many other points affecting fit.

"For every woman who boasts that she can 'just walk into a store and get a perfect fit' there are a dozen who have to pay extra for alterations or make them at

(* Sp. from Bartlett)

home. Garments returned because of poor fit are a big expense to retailers and mail-order houses, and a source of great irritation and loss of time to us women.

"Ruth O'Brien, of the Bureau of Home Economics says: 'No scientific study of actual body measurements for sizing women's garments has ever been reported. The measurements now used have grown up in the industries by the trial and error method. So both retailers and manufacturers of women's clothing have asked the Bureau to undertake such a study. The Works Progress Administration is financing the study.

"The plan is to weigh each subject and record 58 definite measurements of her body. Only 36 measurements were taken in the children's study, but women's clothing requires a snug fit in more parts of the body than children's. Some of the measurements will meet special needs. For example, underwear firms want to know the range in length for shoulder straps on slips and vests and other underwear. They want to know where to attach the straps so they won't slide off the shoulders. Certain of the measures now being taken in the study will give this information.

"Although knitted underwear seems more or less adaptable to the body, many interested letters have come from makers of panties, scanties, vests, and union suits. Corset and foundation garment manufacturers have asked for 'before and after' trunk measurements, that will show what changes in waist and hip measurements are produced when a woman dons a controlling garment of that kind.

"Hosiery mills want to know more about leg measurements. Not only about leg length, but measurements that will help them size for thick and thin ankles, and large size above the knees.

"One of the requested measurements is 'sitting spread'. This is taken with the subject seated. When manufacturers include enough material below the waist line to take care of 'sitting spread' we won't have to return dresses because the seams have 'popped'.

"Other manufacturers want measurements for designing clothes properly for

(12/11/59)

women who are very active in one way and another. Women who drive cars or play golf need plenty of width in the back between the shoulders, and lots of room around the armholes. Some women have rolls of fat up near their arms toward the back. And some have extra long or extra short arms, short or long waist length. Some have very wide shoulders,- or very narrow shoulders. Some shoulders are very square and some have a very sharp slope. Since women's dresses hang from the shoulders, such irregularities throw off the fit of the front and back and neck.

"It's plain that we 'widows of fifty and housewives thrifty' differ in our figures at many important points. Nobody knows yet just what measurements will be needed for good fit. Perhaps you are wondering what women are being measured. Well, many have volunteered through parent-teacher and church associations, and other women's clubs, also many in retail stores and government organizations. The aim is to measure women with as widely different occupations as possible since some kinds of work influence body build, and since the completed study ought to represent a cross section of all American women.

"All the measurements taken apply to clothes worn on the trunk of the body. Lack of time and other difficulties prevent taking head measurements for sizing hats, foot measurements for shoes, or hand measurements for gloves, although these measurements would be both interesting and useful. Maybe they will be made later."

And with that notation your Washington correspondent winds up her tape measure and her letter about the new study of body measurements by the Bureau of Home Economics.
